DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 039 214 TE 000 589

AUTHOR	Reavis, Charles A.
TITLE	Exercise for Encouragement.
INSTITUTION	Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English.
PUB DATE	Apr 68
NOTE	3p.
JOURNAL CIT	Wisconsin English Journal; v10 n3 p39-41 Apr 1968
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.25
DESCRIPTORS	*English Instruction, Language Usage, Learning Experience, *Pattern Drills (Language), *Self Concept, *Student Motivation

ABSTRACT

As a means of revitalizing the drill (still the most convenient technique of practicing skills in such subjects as grammar and punctuation), the content of exercises should be reworked to (1) motivate the student to complete the drill carefully through stressing reasons for correct English usage, (2) facilitate proper mental attitudes by making the student aware of the expected learning outcome, and (3) improve the student's self-image by assuring him of his ability to learn the material. (MF)

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EXERCISE FOR ENCOURAGEMENT

CHARLES A. REAVIS
University of North Carolina, Charlotte

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Drills have seldom been a favored method of instruction. Leading educators through the centuries have been critical of the use of meaningless drills. Numerous studies and experiments have demonstrated that little transfer occurs from practice in monotonous drill to application in one's personal writing. Students as a rule do not enjoy drill. The monitorial school of the early 1800's organized the use of drill better than any other type of school in this country before or since; yet Cubberly notes that its period of influence extended only from 1815 to 1830. *The Encyclopedia of Educational Research* supplies no justification for the use of drill in the classroom.

These facts notwithstanding the inclusion of numerous drills in recent texts of English grammar and the availability of workbooks from most publishers appear to argue that drill still comprises a significant portion of the teaching-learning process in many classrooms. There are several possible explanations for this. Drill is still the most readily available manner of assuring a given amount of practice in a particular skill in grammar or punctuation. In addition, advances in the field of duplicating technology have resulted in processes that provide multiple copies of a drill at a nominal cost. If one does not wish to prepare the stencils himself, he may purchase stencils that are already cut and ready to be duplicated. Finally, for the teacher with 150 or more pupils and after-class responsibilities as well, drills may seem to offer the only means of providing additional practice in areas of persistent student errors.

If the drill is a frequently used instructional technique, and their availability makes it appear that they are, their content should be revised with a view toward improving motivating value. Educational psychology courses have traditionally stressed the favorable effect on learning of motivation and mind-set. More recently, the pupil's self-image has been held to be a vital factor in his ability to learn. In brief, if the pupil is not motivated to learn or does not believe that he can learn, he is not likely to learn a great deal. Yet it appears that little of this information regarding learning conditions finds its way into exercises in English grammar.

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In this respect it seems that those who prepare typewriter instruction manuals are far ahead of us in English. One finds in typewriter manuals many examples of encouraging, motivating exercises. Such exercises assure the student that he is making progress, that he does have the ability and that it is important for him to practice diligently and attentively. Contents of such exercises are similar to those that follow:

1. You may improve your speed by maintaining a steady rhythm.
2. Good typing is merely a matter of regular and attentive practice.
3. Most people have the skill to be acceptable typists.
4. Each day you make some progress even if you don't realize it.
5. Even the best typists make occasional errors.

By contrast, consider these exercises on grammar taken from a typical

English text:

1. _____ is my English teacher.
2. _____ growled a warning.
3. _____ scooted over to the curb.
4. _____ glittered in the moonlight.
5. _____ flippantly tossed a coin to the beggar.
6. _____ suddenly leaped to her feet.

The above English exercises violate several rules of learning. They are not interesting. They do not encourage the pupil to attempt them. They are not expressed particularly well. They do not relate to the life experiences of the pupil. They do not improve his self-image. One gets the distinct impression that they were written to exemplify a point in grammar and the game is to guess which point. One could scarcely work through a series of exercises such as those above and still feel that the study of grammar was a serious, important matter.

These exercises might have a much greater impact psychologically if they offered more encouragement for the student attempting them. If we take the four basic sentence patterns suggested by Loban, Ryan, and Squire in their book *Teaching Language and Literature*[1] as an example of an approach to the teaching of grammar, a set of teaching sentences such as these might be developed:

Pattern I: Subject-Predicate

1. Students must take English every year.
2. Inductive thinking, rather than mere rule-learning, must be used in learning grammar properly.

Pattern II: Subject-Predicate-Object

3. Inductive thinking requires the objective consideration of the total sentence and the knowledge of sentence patterns.
4. Knowledge of sentence patterns provides keys to understanding language and grammar.
5. All people today should use language appropriately because of the accessibility of instruction.

Pattern III: Subject-Linking Predicate-Predicate Nominative

6. Appropriate use of language is one of the marks of a well-educated person.
7. By the end of the year all persistent pupils will be improved users of language.
8. A sense of satisfaction is certain to be the result of successful completion of these sentences.

Pattern IV: Subject-Predicate-Predicate Adjective

9. All students are capable of increasing their competence in language.
10. This exercise should be helpful in improving your understanding of language.

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[1]Loban, Walter, Margaret Ryan, and James R. Squire, TEACHING LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1961), p. 556.

The above sentences might be used in an exercise by mixing them up and having the students identify the sentence patterns. Several features of these teaching sentences should be noted. Sentences 1, 5, 6, and 8 supply motivation to the student to try to learn by directing his attention to the importance of English and the satisfaction he might derive from completing the exercise accurately. The purpose of sentences 2, 3, 4, and 10 is to improve the student's mind set; that is, to keep his mind focused on the expected learning outcome. Sentences 7 and 9 aid the student's self image; they encourage the pupil to view himself as being capable of some success and picture himself as more successful in the near future.

There are three psychological goals one should seek to build into his exercises. First, the content of the exercises should motivate the pupil to complete them carefully and thoughtfully. In order to do this the exercises should stress the reasons for using correct English. These reasons should relate to the immediate goals of the pupil as much as possible rather than stressing the benefits that will accrue later in college or on the job.

Next, the content of the exercises should facilitate a correct mind-set with regard to completion of the exercises. It has frequently been observed that people see and hear that for which they are seeking and listening. Many have had the experience of being deep in thought and walking past a good friend without recognizing him. This is mind-set in operation. It may well be that students write exercises without the proper mind-set, that is, without being aware of the expected learning outcome. Proper mind-set is facilitated when the pupil is constantly reminded, through the content of the exercises, of the expected learning outcome. Among these would be thorough and accurate knowledge of the rules, ability to apply rules in exercises and ability to transfer this knowledge to his personal writing.

The student's image of his ability to learn English is likely to be well formed by the time he enters high school. This image certainly affects the amount he learns. Exercises that improve a person's self-image are those that assure him of his ability to learn the material, refer to other students who thought they couldn't learn but did, encourage him to picture himself as successful in English, and direct his attention to the positive elements in his success in English rather than his failures.

The above suggestions are offered with the hope that they will enable teachers to revitalize the content of their drills and exercises. The gains that will accrue may be more in the area of attitudes or other intangibles rather than in actual test scores. However, it would appear that exercises stressing encouragement would be of considerably more value than the inane exercises one presently finds in texts, workbooks and teacher guides.

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